

Go in Faith, to Love and Serve the Lord
By Josette Keelor

Recently I read a story online: Homeless Samaritan buys home with money from fundraiser

In this story, a homeless man used his last \$20 to buy a tank of gas for a woman who was stranded on an exit ramp. The homeless man walked a few blocks to buy her gas, and though she didn't have money to repay him at the time, she sought him out a few days later to give him the money, and she visited him a few more times to bring food and water.

Then, she and her boyfriend created a GoFundMe page as a thank you and to try to help him get back on his feet. At the time of this story, the fundraiser had raised more than \$397,000.

"The feeling is indescribable," the homeless man said, "and (it's) all thanks to the support and generosity that each and every one of you has shown. I'll continue to thank you every single day for the rest of my life."

In addition to buying his house and eventually his dream truck (a 1999 Ford Ranger), he said he is donating some of his money to a Philadelphia grade school student who is helping another homeless veteran. And he hopes his fans continue to pay it forward.

As of now, the GoFundMe page has surpassed \$400,000.

There are also two trust funds being set up for him, including a retirement fund and one to give him an annual salary.

In my last sermon a few weeks ago, I spoke of the Good Samaritan from scripture, but I thought it was a topic worth revisiting today, not only as part of the Christmas season but also as we look ahead to a new year.

Jesus said, in Matthew 25:31-46, that whoever feeds, clothes, or houses the least among us also does so for Him.

Wow. Can you think of a better example of these words than the story of the homeless Pennsylvania man?

Tomorrow we begin a new year, and as we look toward the future, what better resolution for us to make than to strive to be better to each other and better members of God's church?

Last year at this time, I read in a local newspaper a column by a community pastor who wrote of this very topic. In our efforts this year to change – to look better, feel better, or

better manage our lives – he offered what I thought was a magnificent challenge: Make an effort to look more like Jesus by the end of the year.

“Although none of us will achieve perfection in this life,” he said, “becoming like Christ and being mistaken for him really should be every Christian’s goal, not because of our titles or positions, but because of our actions, attitudes and thoughts.”

His words had an impact on me then, and I thought they would be worth repeating now.

It’s long been known that helping others improves our outlook on life and makes us more grateful for what we have. The more we help others, the better we’ll feel about ourselves, which will give us a greater purpose that has nothing to do with acquiring, consuming, or trying to achieve that perfect life.

God knows what is perfect for our lives. But we need to follow Him to find it.

It’s said that the homeless, or others who have very little of what we would call necessities like houses, cars, or money, are the most generous. Even when they seem to have nothing themselves, they’ll give to someone they perceive as having even less.

In another parable, recorded in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4, Jesus told of a poor widow who gave her last two coins to the temple treasury. She might be a widow without an income, but in her mind she wasn’t poor, for she still had a couple of coins. She could still afford to give.

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

But how many times have we seen someone in need and thought we couldn’t afford to give them something? Or if we did give something, how much was it? Fifty cents to a Salvation Army collection kettle? Five dollars to a man with a sign standing by a Martin’s grocery store? Maybe even twenty dollars to a GoFundMe campaign?

Every little bit helps -- we know that much from the story of the Pennsylvania homeless man. Most of the donations on that GoFundMe page were in the form of \$10 or \$20 -- but they added up to more than \$400,000. And other GoFundMe pages have also added to the homeless man’s welfare.

These are stunning examples of how people all contributing to the same cause can work miracles. Those who gave to this man not only got him off the street and into a house and are working on getting him a steady income, but their generosity has also inspired him to give to others, who in turn will likely also pay it forward.

And it all started with this man giving his last \$20 to a stranger who was stranded along the side of the road.

Still, it wasn't the money that inspired this story. It was the gesture. He could have given her \$5 to get her to the closest hotel where she might have called her boyfriend, and kept the remaining \$15 for himself. After all, he probably needed the money more than she did. But it was his great sacrifice to give her all the money he had that made this story so inspirational and in turn inspired her not only to pay him back and go the extra mile to bring him food and water, but also to start a fund for him. It inspired others to donate as well. And in the end, it inspired him to turn right around and keep the goodwill going.

The next time we come across a GoFundMe campaign, we could give 10, 20, even \$50. It would be so easy. One click and the money is transferred, and we probably won't even miss it from our bank accounts. It's a nice gesture that could help someone in untold ways. Ten dollars could buy them a breakfast for a week. Twenty could buy them a week of dinners. And \$50 might go as far as getting them a night or two away from this bitter cold.

But how many of us would be willing to give our last 10, our last 20, our last \$50 -- knowing we might not get it back, knowing that brings our bank account to zero with no idea of when it will be filled again? Knowing as a result that our electricity might be shut off. Or we might run out of gas along our own commute. Or we might go hungry.

It's a terrifying idea. And probably most of us wouldn't do it. It's tough to have that kind of faith that God really will provide for us when we have nothing.

And maybe that homeless man, in giving away his last \$20, was relying on some other generous Good Samaritan to come along and give him money later in the day. Maybe the \$20 he gave to the stranded motorist had come from some other generous motorist earlier that day. But wouldn't that only serve to make this story even better, knowing that a small gesture you do for someone could help another person five steps down the line? Or fifty steps down the line?

These are the gestures that change the world.

No one would have blamed that stranded motorist if she had paid back the homeless man and left it at that. The chain would have ended with her, but instead, she chose to keep it going. A chain that began with the person who gave the homeless man \$20, and continued on through the Good Samaritan to the woman and her boyfriend, and to all the people who donated to online campaigns or started their own campaigns, to the news stations who reported this story, to all the people who read this story, and now to us -- who have heard this story and might be inspired to keep paying it forward.

In this new year, let us be Good Samaritans to those who need us. Let us give of ourselves to help those who have even less.

Let us put aside our worldly goods in favor of God. For only then will we understand true wealth.